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RESEARCH FUND FOR EDUCATION

AN EDITORIAL[1]

The natural sciences were greatly stimulated during the war and after the war found it desirable to carry forward in the National Research Council an organization devoted to the promotion of co-operation in research. Something analogous is certainly needed in each of the social sciences. Especially is this true in the field of research as applied to school practices, where unique difficulties appear in co-ordinating scientific work.

A most significant step has been taken in the direction of providing for the promotion of broad educational research by the newest of the foundations, the Commonwealth Fund. This is a foundation established by the Harkness estate for the purpose of aiding in any worthy social or educational cause. It has been canvassing for some time the possibility of contributing in a productive way to public education and has finally established a fund for the support of research, amounting to $100,000 a year for a period of five years. The statement issued by the directors with regard to their method of procedure in establishing this research fund is as follows:

The directors of the Commonwealth Fund, having become convinced of the importance of encouraging educational research, requested a group of leading educational men of the country to report upon the opportunities in the field and recommend a plan of operation.

This Educational Research Conference was held in Atlantic City on October 23, 24, and 25, 1920. The members attending the conference were: A. Ross Hill, President, University of Missouri, *Chairman;* Lotus D. Coffman, President, University of Minnesota; Charles H. Judd, Director, School of

[1] In view of the fact that the announcement included in this editorial is of major importance for the type of work which the journals published by the Department of Education aim to foster, the editorial will be published in both the *School Review* and the *Elementary School Journal.* This breach of our common practice will be easily understood as an effort to give as wide publicity as possible to an important contribution to educational research.

Education, University of Chicago; Paul Monroe, Director, School of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University; Leonard P. Ayres, Director, Division of Education, Russell Sage Foundation; Samuel P. Capen, Secretary, American Council on Education; Paul H. Hanus, Professor of Education, Harvard University; Max Farrand, General Director of the Commonwealth Fund.

A gratifying feature of the conference was that the members were able to agree so readily, not merely upon the large divisions of the field, which were fairly obvious, but also in selecting some of the most desirable problems to be investigated within each division.

The conference therefore made its report, choosing for its main subjects: the problem of school revenues; the evaluation, analysis, measures and standards of accomplishment of school subjects; the field of supervision; and the reorganization of public-school systems. In each one of these larger divisions the conference chose a particular subject by way of illustration, suggesting how and by whom the study of that particular subject might be advisedly undertaken.

For the carrying on of this research, the conference recommended the appointment of a committee to consider and recommend projects for research, and to assume executive responsibility for supervising the carrying on of such researches as might be adopted, and it was deemed advisable that this committee might also recommend researches to be undertaken by individuals or associations.

The directors of the Commonwealth Fund accepted this report, and appointed the following committee: Leonard P. Ayres, Vice-President, Cleveland Trust Company; Samuel P. Capen, Secretary, American Council on Education, *Secretary;* Lotus D. Coffman, President, University of Minnesota; Ellwood P. Cubberley, Professor, Stanford University; Charles H. Judd, Director, School of Education, University of Chicago; Paul Monroe, Director, School of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University; Frank E. Spaulding, Professor, Yale University; Max Farrand, General Director, the Commonwealth Fund, *Chairman,* ex officio.

There were several methods of supporting research open to the directors of the Commonwealth Fund. They might have followed the example of the Russell Sage Foundation and set up a special central bureau for such work. Under the direction of Dr. L. P. Ayres, the Russell Sage Foundation has produced a series of notable studies, including the earlier studies of medical inspection, and of laggards, and the later work on the writing and spelling scales and the comparisons of state school systems. It was the judgment of the conference at Atlantic City that such a form of organization would be likely to withdraw from existing institutions

a number of persons who are very much needed to train advanced students of education and, furthermore, such a central bureau or agency would be not unlikely to narrow its interests and deal with a more limited range of investigations than will be provided for under the plan adopted.

A second plan of organizing research which might have been adopted was that of subsidizing institutions which are engaged in research work at the present time. This is a familiar form of support dispensed by foundations. It contributes to the upbuilding of institutions, but usually leaves research in a particular field to compete for support with the other vital interests of the institutions, or else, through the establishment of special research institutions, tends to foster the same type of specialization that was referred to in the discussion of a central bureau under the immediate control of the foundation. At the present time, when universities are straining every resource to provide for abnormally large bodies of students, there are many examples of neglect of research because the general demands of institutional up-keep are so exacting. The Atlantic City conference was not in favor of an expenditure of the funds on the endowment of institutions.

There was another type of consideration which contributed largely to the decisions which were reached with regard to the method of organizing the responsible committee. There is great need in American education of some new method of promoting national co-operation in research along educational lines. In no field of scientific work are the dangers of scattered and competitive activities so great. The single worker, realizing that the limited time and funds which he can command will not carry him far, is eager to make as much of a showing as he can with his minor production. We see as a result a whole series of worthy, but comparatively trivial, pieces of research, carrying the names of their authors, until the number of personally named scales, tests, and conclusions on educational matters has reached the point where one can hardly carry in mind the encyclopedic array. The temptation has been strong under these conditions to magnify individual interests and to minimize objective results.

Furthermore, it has at times been very difficult to secure co-operation between institutions. Institutional leadership in research has in some cases been sought, not by the methods of encouragement of all who are contributing, but by systematic depreciation of all work which comes from other institutions. There can be no doubt that this form of institutional rivalry has held back the science of education in serious degree.

Mere gifts to individual institutions might ultimately overcome some of this pettiness by increasing the volume of production until educational science reached the level of the maturer social sciences, but the prospect seems remote. It is clear that one of the most important contributions which the Commonwealth Fund has already made to educational science is that it has set the example of broad co-operation. There will of necessity grow out of this spirit of co-operation a more wholesome view of the meaning of objectivity. There will be a submerging of petty rivalries.

One illustration of the need of co-operation can be given by commenting on one of the items which is mentioned, but not fully described, in the list of possible lines of research. The item in question is the fourth in the list, namely, "reorganization of public-school systems." During the last decade there has been spreading through all parts of the nation a reorganization of the upper grades of the elementary school, of the first two years of college, and of the whole structure of the high school. The movement of reorganization has been sponsored by no single group of leaders; it has had no single pattern on which to work out its changes, and yet it has shown astonishing vitality. A number of writers have tried to describe the movement, but clearly no one has compassed in any statement yet published its full scope and meaning. It is a spontaneous nation-wide movement toward a new kind of a school system.

Like all movements in our educational system, it has suffered at some points from mismanagement and has been held in check as a result of lack of a broad spirit of national appreciation of its significance. There is evident need of more than piecemeal description of single aspects of this movement. There is need of a

steady, broad canvass of general conditions, followed by careful testing of results and vigorous promotion of constructive changes. This means something more than sporadic partisan investigations; it means a persistent and comprehensive examination of all aspects of the reorganization that is going forward, and it also means encouragement of experimentation. The Commonwealth Fund committee should be able to promote such general investigations and as a result should be able to contribute to the general reorganization.

The Commonwealth Fund program is unique in that it does not duplicate the activities of other organizations and does not come into the field as a rival of any existing educational agency. It is sometimes pointed out that the national government ought to carry on educational research as it carries on research in agriculture. It is often said that state departments of education should make themselves responsible for the collection and distribution of more information of the type which will guide school practices. Municipalities are beginning in some quarters to see the importance of scientific tests and investigations as a part of their regular work. But the combined contributions of all these agencies are small as compared with the needs, for the reason that nearly all the energy that can be expended by any public administration must go into routine. The people of this country are slow to see the importance of public support of research, even when the efficiency of their institutions is involved. In some way or other there must be pioneer work which will demonstrate the value of scientific research. Such pioneer work always has to depend on private endowment or the personal initiative of single devotees to scientific methods.

The result is that most of the scientific work which has been done in education is the work of departments of education in universities, colleges, and normal schools. But such departments are also absorbed in routine—the routine of organizing and teaching classes of students. They have perhaps more opportunity than public administrative agencies to devote time to research, but they suffer marked limitations. They lack also in some instances the breadth of view that is needed in a period of general educational reorganization.

All these struggling agencies need a margin of additional support. They need to have a little more energy and a little more opportunity than is provided for their routine work. The administration of this margin must also be unlimited as to region or problems. It is desirable that there should be help for anyone who is working productively anywhere in the nation.

The Commonwealth Research Fund promises to be a source of exactly the kind of margin that workers in the field of education need. Temporary grants for particular pieces of work are possible on a generous scale. What is needed is definite and well-considered plans of action from all who can advantageously use this margin.

There will doubtless be, as there always is at the beginning of any such enterprise, a great deal of misunderstanding. Some people will think of this as a new source of institutional endowment and will ask that their institutions be endowed in order to carry them through some practical emergency or in order to promote their general activities. Some will think of research as a special type of propaganda. They will feel that the fund ought to be expended in the spread of ideas which they have long cherished as essential to the betterment of American education. Gradually such misconceptions will be overcome, however, and there will be a more general appreciation of the meaning and importance of research in education.

The requests for aid which were presented to the committee at its first meeting exhibited all shades of interpretation of the meaning of research. Those requests which received favorable consideration were the ones which set forth in detail and in exact form the problem to be attacked, the method of attack, the time at which a report could be rendered, and the resources both in the way of personal services and equipment necessary to carry out the research.

The secretary of the committee, Dr. S. P. Capen, and Professor Max Farrand, the Director of the Fund, who is also chairman of the committee, are the proper persons to address in presenting proposals or making inquiries. The former is to be reached at 818 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D.C., the latter at 1 East 57th Street, New York City.